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Report Highlights:

Welcome to Hot Bites from India, a weekly food and agricultural news summary. This report includes information gathered by local agricultural analysts and/or reported in the local media.

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General Information:

AGRICULTURAL SITUATION

32 BILLS LISTED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE MONSOON SESSION

Bills to be introduced include, The National Food Security Bill, The Agricultural Biosecurity Bill, The Biotechnology Regulatory Authority of India Bill, and The Warehousing Corporation (Amendment) Bill. (Source: [Business Standard](#), 07/30/2011)

IMD PROJECTS 'BELOW NORMAL' MONSOON IN AUGUST-SEPT

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast 'below normal' rainfall for the country during the second half (August-September) of the current south-west monsoon season. (Source: [Hindu Business Line](#), 08/01/2011)

SACRIFICE GROWTH TO CONTROL PRICES: BJP

The BJP demanded in Parliament on Wednesday that the government should compromise even on economic growth, if need be, to control the runaway prices. (Source: [Hindustan Times 8/4/11](#))

RETAIL

FINMIN FOR BODY TO MONITOR FDI IN MULTI BRAND RETAIL

While the government is all set to open doors to foreign direct investment (FDI) in multi-brand retail subject to a few conditions, including a minimum 50% investment in back-end infrastructure, the finance ministry has pitched for a monitoring mechanism to ensure that investors comply with the conditions. (Source: [Financial Express](#), 08/01/2011)

GRAIN AND FEED

AREA SOWN UNDER COARSE CEREALS, PULSES SHRINK DESPITE MONSOON REVIVAL

Areas under coarse cereals, which are alternative crops for farmers but important for the fodder and livestock industry, continued to lag till July 29 behind the same period last year. The same is the case with pulses, an important constituent of an Indian meal. (Source: [Business Standard](#), 08/01/2011)

NON-BASMATI RICE EXPORT AGAIN ON HOLD

The government Saturday put on hold non-basmati rice export in the wake of litigation over the process adopted by the Commerce Ministry for implementation of an Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM)

decision allowing the export of the same. (Source: [Indian Express](#), 07/30/2011); Also see: [Mint](#) 07/30/2011; [Financial Express](#) 08/01/2011.

RICE OUTPUT TARGET TO BE MET DESPITE BELOW NORMAL RAINS, SAYS FARM SECY

After a gap of two years, India will meet a record rice production target of 102 million ton in the current crop year through June 2012 despite below-normal monsoon rains. (Source: [Financial Express](#), 08/03/2011)

COTTON

RESTRICTIONS ON COTTON EXPORTS SET TO BE LIFTED

With abundant availability and crash in cotton prices, the government is likely to lift restrictions on cotton exports for the current season itself. (Source: [Economic Times](#) 7/31/2011)

TRADE

INDIA JAPAN AIM TO DOUBLE BILATERAL TRADE BY 2014

The comprehensive trade pact between India and Japan, which aims to nearly double bilateral trade to \$25 billion by 2014, came into force from Monday. As per the agreement, Japan will immediately eliminate duties on 87 per cent of its tariff lines, a Commerce Ministry statement said. (Source: [Hindu Business Line](#), 08/02/2011)

DAIRY

GOVT OKAYS DAIRY PLAN, WORLD BANK TO CHIP IN

Upset with milk prices continuing to spiral high, the government has finalized an ambitious Rs 8,000-crore national dairy plan to increase per cow milk production through artificial insemination. (Source: [Mint](#), 08/01/2011)

AGRICULTURAL POLICY

FOOD LAW LIKELY TO BE DELAYED

Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar said that he fully supports the proposed food security legislation, but without the right strategies, it could cook up food fiasco in the long term. (Source: [Hindustan Times](#) 7/30/2011)

PESTICIDES

NO PROOF THAT ENDOSULFAN POSED HEALTH RISKS, CENTRE TELLS SC

The Union Agricultural and Cooperation Department on Tuesday told the Supreme Court that there was no evidence to suggest that long-term use of endosulfan posed health hazards and various nations had

banned the pesticide as a precautionary measure. (Source: [Indian Express](#), 08/03/2011)

NEWS IN DETAIL:

Lok Pal Bill to be tabled next week

BS Reporters

New Delhi: Besides the Lok Pal Bill, 32 other important ones for introduction include the National Food Security Bill, one on land acquisition and rehabilitation, and the Prevention of Money Laundering (Amendment) Bill.

Bansal said if the standing committee gave its recommendations on the Lok Pal Bill by the end of August, its passage could go ahead. He dismissed team Anna Hazare's criticism of the Bill, cleared by the Cabinet yesterday, saying it was the view of just a section of civil society and "not a democratic idea".

"They should also respect others' views," the minister said. With the session expected to be stormy, the minister assured the government's readiness to discuss any issue. He appealed to the Opposition for cooperation in smooth conduct of the business. The session is scheduled to have 22 sittings. Bansal denied the government was postponing bringing forward the Bill concerning whistleblowers (those who reveal corruption or misuse within an organisation), saying it was already on the "live register" of Parliament.

He answered no questions on the resignations by a dozen MPs from the Telangana region to press the separate statehood demand. "We have no role. The Speaker has to consider it and take a decision," he said. He felt Public Accounts Committee Chairman Murli Manohar Joshi should not proceed with the draft report on the telecom spectrum scam, since it had been returned by the Speaker.

"Joshi is a senior member and he should not have sent the draft report to the Speaker in the first place. Only those reports which have been approved are sent to the Speaker and not the drafts," he said.

IMD projects 'below normal' monsoon in August-Sept

Harish Damodaran/Vinson Kurian – Hindu Business Line

New Delhi/Thiruvananthapuram: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast 'below normal' rainfall for the country during the second half (August-September) of the current south-west monsoon season.

This comes even as the first half (June-July) has turned out to be not so bad, with the monsoon showers being reasonably well spread, both in spatial as well as temporal terms.

According to the IMD, rainfall for the country as a whole during August-September is likely to be 90 per cent of the 'normal' or long period average (LPA) of 435 millimetres (mm) for these two months. That makes it 'below normal', technically defined to be between 86 and 94 per cent of the LPA.

Moreover, there is a 27 per cent likelihood of the monsoon even being 'deficient' (below 85 per cent of

the LPA) during the second half. The corresponding probabilities for 'below normal' (86-94 per cent of LPA), 'near normal' (95-105 per cent), 'above normal' (106-115 per cent) and 'excess' (above 115 per cent) are pegged at 46 per cent, 24 per cent, three per cent and zero respectively.

The IMD's quantitative rainfall forecast at 90 per cent of LPA for August-September – with a model error of plus or minus 8 per cent – would suggest a weakening of monsoon activity during the second half of the season.

Good first half

The first half had seen the country receive an area-weighted rainfall of 429.2 mm, which was 94.87 per cent of the LPA of 452.4 mm for June-July. Within that, rainfall was surplus (111.31 per cent of LPA) in June and deficient (85.57 per cent) in July.

If the IMD's 90 per cent of LPA rainfall prediction for August-September – based on its Long Range Forecast Outlook released on Monday – comes true, the 2011 monsoon season would return an overall shortfall of about 7.5 per cent (92.5 per cent of LPA).

But these overall percentages, by themselves, may not hold much meaning. For agriculture, what matters is not aggregate numbers as much as their distribution across space and time. By that yardstick, this year's monsoon has so far been quite satisfactory.

As the accompanying table shows, most of the areas that received very little rains in June – the contiguous stretch covering Gujarat, Maharashtra, North Interior Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu – saw a revival of monsoon activity during July. As a result, there has been a considerable lowering of sowing acreage deficit for most kharif crops over the last couple of weeks.

The converse of this, however, has been that much of the North and East, which were hugely rainfall surplus in June, recorded sub-par precipitation in July. In other words, a balancing of sorts has taken place, with no region (barring maybe, Assam) going entirely dry over the two months.

No reason for pessimism

The other sliver lining is that the IMD itself does not give any specific reason for its pessimistic prognosis for August-September. The Department has, in fact, virtually ruled out the emergence of any 'El Nino' conditions associated with monsoon failure.

According to it, the latest global forecasts “from a majority of dynamical and statistical models indicate high probability (about 80 per cent) for the present ENSO-neutral conditions (i.e. neither El Nino nor La Nina) to continue during the remaining part of the 2011 south-west monsoon season.”

That perhaps indicates the IMD's preference to err on the side of caution.

Sacrifice growth to control prices: BJP
HT Correspondents, Hindustan Times

New Delhi: The BJP demanded in Parliament on Wednesday that the government should compromise

even on economic growth, if need be, to control the runaway prices. Launching the debate on inflation in Lok Sabha, BJP leader and former finance minister Yashwant Sinha said, "If growth means inflation, we don't want it. We won't accept inflation above 3%." He wanted the government to control prices in two months.

The BJP's views on economic growth, however, look different from its "India Shining" slogan in 2004 when it received a drubbing in the general elections.

The Congress and other opposition parties then argued that although the shining growth story resulted from the economic liberalisation initiated by the Congress in the 1990s, the man in the street had been excluded during the BJP rule.

Sinha quoted a report of the Asian Development Bank that said half-a-million Indians were pushed below poverty line because of the food inflation in the past three years.

He also referred to a report by CRISIL - a global firm providing business ratings - saying Indian households spent Rs 6 lakh crore more in the past three years, while the total government revenue was Rs 6.5 lakh crore last year.

Countering, law minister Salman Khurshid said, "We have to ensure enough growth that can allow us to help the poor. We don't believe in growth at any rate."

Referring to the reports quoted by Sinha, Khurshid said various reports were brought out periodically with a specific perspective, and not always with the entire truth.

Attributing the high inflation rate to global crude prices, he said the government had taken a number of measures, such as reducing import duties and suspending futures trading in rice and certain pulses.

There will be a vote on the price rise debate on Thursday.

FINMIN FOR BODY TO MONITOR FDI IN MULTI BRAND RETAIL

Himani Kaushik, Timsy Jaipuria, Financial Express

While the government is all set to open doors to foreign direct investment (FDI) in multi-brand retail subject to a few conditions, including a minimum 50% investment in back-end infrastructure, the finance ministry has pitched for a monitoring mechanism to ensure that investors comply with the conditions.

A ministry official, requesting anonymity, said, "The DIPP (department of industrial policy and promotion) has not proposed any monitoring mechanism for proposed FDI in multi-brand retail. If no system is put in place, then what is the assurance that these players will work towards improving infrastructure?"

The committee of secretaries (COS) headed by cabinet secretary Ajit Kumar Seth has recently cleared 51% FDI in multi-brand retail with a few riders.

The key conditions on which the approval was given by the CoS include proposals below the minimum threshold amount of \$100 million would not be considered.

It would also be mandatory for investors to spend 50% of the amount towards building and maintaining back-end infrastructure such.

AREA SOWN UNDER COARSE CEREALS, PULSES SHRINK DESPITE MONSOON REVIVAL

Sanjeeb Mukherjee , Business Standard

New Delhi: Areas under coarse cereals, which are alternative crops for farmers but important for the fodder and livestock industry, continued to lag till July 29 behind the same period last year, despite a revival in monsoon rains in most parts of the country. The same is the case with pulses, an important constituent of an Indian meal.

Pulses have been sown in around 7.39 million hectares of land till Friday, down almost 10 per cent from the same period last year. Though the overall area in pulses was down, there has been a big improvement on a week-on-week basis.

“Pulses sowing can continue even in August and we are hopeful of making up for the deficiency in the coming days,” a senior government official said.

Sowing of coarse cereals, which include maize, jowar (sorghum), bajra (pearl millet), ragi and small millets, was down as compared to the period last year. The area under other main kharif crops including paddy, oilseeds, sugarcane and cotton was more than last year as on Friday, as the southwest monsoon showed signs of revival.

Officials said below-normal monsoon in early days of July in Gujarat, Maharashtra, along with parts of Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka had pulled down the acreage under coarse cereals. In Maharashtra, the area covered under maize was almost 19 per cent down from last year at 506,000 hectares till Friday. Similarly in Gujarat, the area was 265,000 hectares, around 23 per cent down from the same period last year.

In Maharashtra, the acreage under jowar was 28 per cent down at 714,000 hectares, while in Karnataka, it was nine per cent down at 168,000 hectares.

Poor rains initially have also pulled down bajra acreage in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan, the three main producing states.

In Rajasthan, the area under bajra was 7.2 per cent lower this year at 3.91 million hectares, while in Maharashtra and Gujarat, it was 37 per cent and 30 per cent down at 596,000 and 271,000 hectares, respectively.

The acreage of ragi and small millets, largely grown during the rabi sowing season, was also down. “Coarse cereals sowing are lagging as overall rains in Maharashtra, Gujarat and parts of Rajasthan have been less till now,” a senior government official said.

Till last week, in Marathwada, Vidarbha and central regions of Maharashtra, overall rainfall has been almost nine per cent, 14 per cent and three per cent below normal since June, data from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) showed.

In Gujarat, the southwest monsoon has almost been 40 per cent below normal till last week, while in west Rajasthan it was almost 21 per cent below normal.

Overall, across the country, total rainfall this year continued to be below normal. Since June 1, the country has received 399.1 millimetres of rainfall, which was four per cent below normal.

The situation is worst in eastern and northeastern states, where rainfall has been 15 per cent below normal till now.

During the week ended July 30, southwest monsoon has been 23 per cent below normal across the country.

Going forward, IMD said monsoon would remain active over north India and also parts of central and eastern India.

NON-BASMATI RICE EXPORT AGAIN ON HOLD

Express news service – Indian Express

New Delhi: The government Saturday put on hold non-basmati rice export in the wake of litigation over the process adopted by the Commerce Ministry for implementation of an Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) decision allowing the export of 10 lakh tonnes of the same.

“...operation and implementation of the allocation made in terms of Trade Notice of July 27 is stayed in view of the order passed by the High Court ,” Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said in a trade notice issued Saturday.

Banned since 2008, rice export was allowed by the EGoM early this month in the wake of record food stocks. Subsequently, the DGFT under the Commerce Ministry notified the decision, inviting exporters to register their contracts on first-come, first-served basis for a maximum of 12,500 tonnes each between July 21-22.

Based on the applications received, by July 27, the DFGT had made allocations of total 10 lakh tonnes of non-basmati rice to “82 successful allottees”.

RICE OUTPUT TARGET TO BE MET DESPITE BELOW NORMAL RAINS, SAYS FARM SECY

Banikinkar Pattanayak, Financial Express

After a gap of two years, India will meet a record rice production target of 102 million tonne in the

current crop year through June 2012 despite below-normal monsoon rains. This could give the government a necessary ammunition as it battles high food inflation and prepares to widen subsidised grain sales to the poor under an ambitious food security law.

Agriculture Secretary PK Basu told FE on Tuesday that the country will reap a bumper harvest of rice, wheat and pulses and is expected to meet the overall food grain output target of 245 million tonne for 2011-12, compared with 241.56 million tonne in 2010-11.

The country missed its rice output targets in 2009-10 and 2010-11 due to droughts as well as floods in some parts, which forced the government to maintain more-than-three-year-old curbs on the export of non-basmati rice to keep domestic supplies steady.

India, the world's second-largest grower of rice and wheat, typically sets output targets of key crops each year and tailors around them crucial farm policies, including minimum state-fixed prices for select commodities, subsidised supplies of high-yielding seeds and fertilisers.

"I am 100% confident that we will meet the rice production target this year. The reason is simple. Planting has gone up from the last year level, and importantly, no district has been affected by either drought or flood so far," Basu told FE. Last year, as many as 90 districts were affected by droughts and 60 districts by floods and rough weather, he added.

"If we could produce more than 95 million tonne of rice in 2010-11 despite such conditions in around 150 districts, we can definitely meet the target this year when chances of a large-scale drought or flood are less," he said. "Although the overall rainfall is expected to be slightly below normal this year, the distribution is likely to be fairly good," he said.

The statements come amid growing apprehension by industry as well as consumers about the government's ability to rein in food inflation that has remained stubbornly high since a drought in 2009 clipped the summer harvest. Sharp volatility in grains production in the past two years has also brought to the fore the issue of sustainability of the proposed food security Act that aims to supply cheaper grains to 75% of rural and 50% of urban households.

Although food inflation has receded from its multi-year-highs in 2010, the Reserve Bank Of India has raised its key policy rates 11 times since last March to suck excess liquidity from the system in a stern reflection that inflation--partly triggered by food prices--is still much above its comfort zone. Although food inflation hinges on a number of factors, including the increase in state-fixed benchmark prices of key commodities as well as their demand, a bumper grains production will at least provide some cushion against any irrational spiralling of prices.

India needs more than 60 million tonne of rice and wheat stocks a year to meet its obligation under the proposed Food Security Act, and an increase in output will help the government in one of its biggest populist drives, especially when it is struggling to prevent an erosion of its image in the public glare following a slew of corruption charges. Significantly, the government has never procured 60 million tonne in a year.

Basu said water reserves are at a ten-year high, which will help the planting of winter crops from

October when the seasonal monsoon shower ends.

More production can also encourage the government to allow exports of wheat and rice since banning the shipments in 2007 and 2008, respectively.

RESTRICTIONS ON COTTON EXPORTS SET TO BE LIFTED

ECONOMIC TIMES

PTI Jul 31, 2011, 11.24am IST

With abundant availability and crash in prices, the government is likely to lift restrictions on cotton exports for the current season itself, sources said.

The issue came in for review at a meeting of secretaries in the ministries of commerce, textiles and agriculture, convened by Commerce and Industry Minister Anand Sharma here yesterday.

In October last year, the government had capped cotton exports at 55 lakh bales (170 kg each) to protect domestic textiles industry in the wake of rising raw material prices. Additional 10 lakh bales were allowed in June, after prices had corrected sharply.

Prices have declined to about Rs 31,000 per candy (356 kg) now from the peak of Rs 62,500 per candy in March-end. Cotton season runs from October to September.

Restrictions on cotton yarn was removed from April 1, after the manufacturers found themselves saddled with big inventory following curbs on exports.

Besides, the changing dynamics in the market, administering the restriction has proved to be "a big headache" for the Commerce Ministry, especially after the recent allocation of 10 lakh bales as some exporters have taken the issue to different courts, sources said.

They said, it was in this context, that Sharma reviewed the situation with the three secretaries at the weekend.

According to the estimates of the Cotton Advisory Board (CAB), the cotton surplus at the end of the current season would be 52.5 lakh bales on account of lower industry demand. In February, the CAB had estimated it to be 27.5 lakh bales.

Likewise, the projections for domestic consumption of cotton for the season have been lowered to 236 lakh bales, as against earlier estimates of 265 lakh bales on account of high inventories.

The cotton production projections, however, have been increased to 325 lakh bales for the current season.

INDIA JAPAN AIM TO DOUBLE BILATERAL TRADE BY 2014

The Hindu, Business Line

New Delhi: The comprehensive trade pact between India and Japan, which aims to nearly double bilateral trade to \$25 billion by 2014, came into force from Monday.

As per the agreement, Japan will immediately eliminate duties on 87 per cent of its tariff lines, a Commerce Ministry statement said.

Most of these items form part of India's export basket to Japan. These include seafood, agricultural products such as mangoes, citrus fruits, spices, instant tea, spirits such as rum, whiskies and vodka, textile products such as woven fabrics, yarns, synthetic yarn, readymade garments, petro chemical and chemical products, cement, and jewellery.

The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement will also boost Indian pharmaceutical exports to Japan, as Japan is mandated to treat Indian drug firms on par with Japanese companies under the terms of the deal. .

Besides, the agreement will enable Indian IT professionals to provide services and further develop Japan's IT industry. Besides contractual service suppliers, independent professionals (accounting, R&D services, tourist guides, market research and management consulting firms) will now be able to offer their services in Japan. Japan has also agreed to conclude a Social Security Agreement within a specified period of three years.

Under the social security deal, India will benefit from Japanese investments, technology and world-class management practices, the official statement said. Japan can take advantage of India's huge and growing market and resources, especially its human resources, it added.

Commerce Secretary, Dr Rahul Khullar, said the pact was a major step in the direction of a comprehensive East Asia partnership. He was speaking after co-chairing the first meeting of the Joint Committee of India-Japan CEPA with Mr Akitaka Saiki, the Japanese Ambassador, here on Monday. This is India's third CEPA (after similar pacts with Singapore and South Korea) , the statement said. Under the pact, India has offered to eliminate duties on only 17.4 per cent of its tariff-lines, the statement said. Tariffs will be brought down to zero in 10 years on 66.32 per cent of tariff lines to give sufficient time to industry to adjust to the trade liberalisation, it added.

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GOVT OKAYS DAIRY PLAN, WORLD BANK TO CHIP IN

Priyadarshi Siddhanta, Mint

New Delhi: Upset with milk prices continuing to spiral high, the government has finalised an ambitious Rs 8,000-crore national dairy plan to increase per cow milk production through artificial insemination. The plan to be implemented from the next financial year with the help of the World Bank, aims at providing financial incentives through cheap loans to the dairy sector to improve quality of cattle with new national insemination programme.

Currently, the animal husbandry departments are in charge for insemination and quality of cattle and dairy sector and are tasked mostly with milk production and its marketing. "We are looking to change the approach. There is no incentive for the veterinary doctors to increase production but the dairy owners have. Therefore, we want to give incentives to dairy owners rather than vets," said Abhijit Sen, Planning Commission member who oversees the sector in the planning body. The milk prices in the last two to three years have almost doubled with the plan panel finding spurt in its demand more than the

production.

FOOD LAW LIKELY TO BE DELAYED

Zia Haq, Hindustan Times

New Delhi, July 29, 2011

Agriculture minister Sharad Pawar has said he fully supports the proposed food security legislation, but without the right strategies, it could cook up a food fiasco in the long-term. Pawar's concerns — his ministry is responsible for ensuring farm output is enough to keep the legislation going — could put off the draft food security bill until the winter Parliament session, sources said.

Even as the food ministry's draft legislation makes generous food allowances for various income groups — from middle-income households down to the poor — Pawar said sustaining the food programme, the world's largest, could be a challenge without adequate safeguards.

"We need to understand that sustaining the food security legislation in the long-term will require massive investments. The costs of the implementing the programme work out to Rs 100,000 crore. We will need at least 25% of that much as investment in agriculture," Pawar said.

He said the current stocks were sufficient to meet requirements under the proposed food law, but alternate strategies would be needed so that the government doesn't default.

Pawar had flagged off some of these concerns in a recent letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Farm output is prone to seasonal swings and India's dodgy monsoon, the only source of irrigation for 60% of cropped areas, remains a top concern. "We need to take into account that monsoon is erratic," Pawar said.

A missed or below-normal monsoon is known to trim India's farm production substantially. The government could pare down some entitlements or bring in more provisions to provide cash instead of food. "We currently provide just wheat and rice. Henceforth, we will be required to provide other nutritional cereals too," he said.

Among the bill's major provisions, the government will hand out subsidized food to 75% of rural and 50% of India's urban households.

The food ministry had prepared a new food security bill, reworking an earlier version and reconciling what had been "promised to the people" by the ruling Congress and the government's fiscal constraints.

NO PROOF THAT ENDOSULFAN POSED HEALTH RISKS, CENTRE TELLS SC

Shaju Philip, Indian Express

Thiruvananthapuram: The Union Agricultural and Cooperation Department on Tuesday told the Supreme Court that there was no evidence to suggest that long-term use of endosulfan posed health hazards and various nations had banned the pesticide as a precautionary measure.

The Union government submitted the counter-affidavit in response to a petition filed by Kerala unit of DYFI, youth wing of CPM, which sought ban on use and production of endosulfan. The DYFI move came in the backdrop of the reported maladies in Kasargode villages, allegedly caused by two-decade-long spraying of the pesticide in cashew plantations.

The affidavit, submitted by Agriculture Department director Vandana Jain, said the Joint Meeting of the Pesticide Review appointed by the WHO and FPO had evaluated in 2006 that “long term intake of residues of endosulfan from uses that have been considered by the JMPR was unlikely to present public health concern”.

RECENT REPORTS SUBMITTED BY FAS/NEW DELHI

REPORT #	SUBJECT	DATE SUBMITTED
IN1168	Weekly Hot Bites, #30	07/29/2011
IN1169	India Moves a Step Closer to FDI in Multi-brand Retail	08/05/2011
IN1170	Grain and Feed Update – August 2011	08/05/2011

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